

Governor's 2016 Agricultural and Urban Conservation Award winners honored today

*Delaware Association of Conservation Districts also honors
Legislator of the Year*

DOVER – The Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village was the setting for today's Stewardship Week proclamation presentation of the annual Governor's Agricultural and Urban Conservation Awards. Governor Jack Markell, along with DNREC Deputy Secretary Kara Coats, Delaware Association of Conservation Districts President Robert Emerson and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Kasey Taylor, led a ceremony recognizing this year's honorees and signed a proclamation officially designating April 24-30 as Soil and Water Stewardship Week in Delaware under the theme, "We All Need Trees."

"Our honorees have demonstrated their continuing commitment to environmental improvement, and on behalf of the people of Delaware, I would like to thank each of them for their dedication and for their time, effort, and investment to implement model conservation practices. I also want to thank all of the Conservation District supervisors and employees for the many and various contributions they make to improve the quality of life in Delaware," said Governor Markell. "Also, I encourage everyone to remember this year's Soil and Water Stewardship Week theme, 'We All Need Trees,' year-round. In addition to providing shade, seasonal beauty and wildlife habitat, trees give us oxygen, cleaner air and reduced soil erosion, runoff and water pollution, to name just a few of their benefits."

"Much of the work we do at DNREC is accomplished through

partnerships with individuals, organizations, municipalities and other state agencies, and these awards highlight the beneficial outcomes of these relationships,” said Deputy Secretary Coats. “This year’s honorees are wonderful and diverse examples of how we can learn from the success of others and can all be better environmental stewards by taking thoughtful and important actions to protect and enhance our water and air quality.”

“Conservation is a vital endeavor – both for the farmers who rely on the land to support their families and for the public who depend on the essential water, soil and wildlife resources that our farmers protect and enhance,” said State Conservationist Kasey Taylor. “We thank these award-winning stewards today and all of those who invest in leaving the land in a much better place for future generations.”

This year’s Conservation Award winners are:

NEW CASTLE COUNTY – Agricultural Award

Emerson Family Farm, Middletown. A fifth-generation dairy operation, Emerson Farms represents the diversity required to maintain and sustain a multi-generational family business. With the purchase of their first farm in 1947, the Emerson family has worked hard to grow their farm over the past 70 years. Changing with the times, the Emersons have adopted 21st century nutrient management technology and numerous conservation-related practices for daily use on nearly 2,000 acres of owned and rented tillable land. Minimizing nutrient impacts on their land and that of their neighbors and staying profitable makes Emerson Farms a standout in an ever-changing farm economy.

In 2014, Emerson Farms invested in a large-scale, state-of-the-art, long-term liquid manure storage system with a capacity of more than 750,000 gallons. They also invested in a heavy-use area concrete pad and guttering to keep clean rain

water clean. Other best management practices include: precision tillage and harvesting, extensive use of cover crops, dairy herd genetic management, on-farm ice cream sales and farm tours, irrigation management and grain storage and marketing.

The Cowgirl Creamery ice cream stand, which sells ice cream made by Woodside Farm Creamery, enables Emerson Farms to showcase Delaware's diverse agricultural products while connecting with neighbors and customers who value fresh, locally grown food. Emerson Farms reinforces the importance of maintaining healthy and viable local farms to support farm families.

To develop and implement their conservation plans, Emerson Farms has worked with the New Castle and Kent Conservation Districts and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) including the USDA-NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Security Program (CSP) as well as the New Castle Conservation District's conservation cost-share program.

Recently, a family member participated in the Delaware Department of Agriculture's Young Farmers Farmland Purchase and Preservation Land program. The farm also is considering applying to DNREC's Water Allocation program to insure long-term allocation to ground and surface water for adequate crop production.

NEW CASTLE COUNTY – Urban Award

Green Valley 2nd Street Streambank Stabilization Project, Project Coordinator Roy Hall, Newark. The Green Valley 2nd Street Streambank Stabilization Project began with a request in 2005 from then-State Representative Pam Maier for New Castle Conservation District to prepare an estimate to correct the erosion "in and around 300 2nd Street." In 2014, a funding commitment from Senator Karen Peterson, 9th District, and

Representative Michael Ramone, 22nd District, provided the impetus for protecting a block of homes on 2nd Street whose backyards were impacted by periodic flooding from White Clay Creek.

The project benefited 17 townhomes through a design combining imbricated stone (overlapped like roof shingles) and an internal underdrain pipe drainage system to stabilize and control erosion outside of the White Clay Creek floodplain. The contractor, Meadville Land Service, completed the project on time and on budget while maintaining excellent communication and relations with all of the impacted property owners. The project avoided impacts with the floodplain, allowing work to move forward without the delay and expense of obtaining federal, state and local permits.

Advice and technical assistance was sought from and provided by the National Park Service, DelDOT, DNREC's Division of Water and the New Castle Department of Land Use. Funding was provided through the Delaware General Assembly from DelDOT's Community Transportation Fund and the 21st Century Project Fund. This project demonstrates design and constructability features that could be used in certain watershed situations throughout the state.

KENT COUNTY – Agricultural Award

Georgie Cartanza, Freedom Farm, Dover. In 2006, Georgie Cartanza started a poultry operation that consisted of four 65' x 600' poultry houses with a capacity of 156,000 roasters. She grew four-and-a-half flocks per year for Perdue Farms, Inc. on her farm, Freedom Farm, just outside of Dover. In 2015, Ms. Cartanza converted to an organic poultry operation and currently grows broilers for Coleman Natural Foods at a rate of 156,000 birds per flock, five-and-a-half flocks per year.

Best management practices implemented on the farm consist of

two 50' x 100' poultry manure storage structures, two 10' x 56' single channel composters and 12 concrete heavy-use area pads to provide proper storage of manure for improved water quality, manure management, poultry mortality management, waste handling, waste storage and nutrient management environmental concerns. These practices were implemented using cost share from the Kent Conservation District (KCD). The farm also has a Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan in place for the poultry operation, written by KCD.

In 2015, Ms. Cartanza obtained a hedgerow planting contract with the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentive Program (EQIP) to plant 5,380 feet of trees as a buffer around the poultry operation to provide shelter from wind, reduce particulates, ammonia and other odors from ventilation fans, as well as shade to reduce summer heat and create a visual screen from surrounding areas. Ms. Cartanza has also used her own funding to improve poor lighting in her poultry houses by upgrading to LED lights. She has applied for the EQIP program again this year to obtain an Energy Audit to make further energy efficient upgrades to her poultry operation.

In January 2015, Ms. Cartanza received the 2014 Environmental Stewardship Award from the Delaware Department of Agriculture for her efforts to improve water quality and reduce nutrient runoff. In her free time, she travels to local elementary schools to educate youth on important aspects of farming and where your food comes from. Ms. Cartanza is currently a member of the Farm Bureau, Delmarva Poultry Industry, and assists with Farm Assessments for Mid Atlantic Farm Credit.

KENT COUNTY – Urban Award

Kent County Levy Court, Dover. In 2014, Kent County implemented a Stormwater Maintenance District (SWMD) to maintain privately-owned stormwater basins, best management practices, and related components of the drainage

infrastructure, using existing county practices for developing other districts such as sanitary sewage collection and refuse removal as the basis for the new SWMD. New residential developments that have stormwater management facilities are required to join the SWMD. Existing residential developments are given the option to join by petition.

One of the most difficult issues regarding surface water management in Delaware and throughout the country is reliance on private entities for the maintenance of stormwater management structures or facilities. The SWMD allows Kent County and the Kent Conservation District to perform maintenance on stormwater facilities in participating communities to ensure the facilities function properly to prevent flooding and maintain water quality. Many homeowner associations in Kent County are not prepared to address long-term maintenance and associated costs of stormwater facility upkeep. Failure to perform routine preventative maintenance can lead to higher future repair/rebuild costs and loss of effective water quality treatment.

Communities that participate in the project benefit by having their stormwater facilities professionally managed, and by having a dedicated funding source to address near-term and long-term maintenance and reconstruction needs. The cost of the program is \$28 per year per household.

Kent County's SWMD stands as a model not only in Delaware, but also nationwide as a way for local and county governments to relieve homeowners of the burden of maintenance of private stormwater facilities and to provide an alternative funding mechanism short of implementing a full stormwater utility.

Kent County and the Kent Conservation District worked with community stakeholders such as Homeowners Associations Resolving Problems to conduct public outreach prior to undertaking the formation of the SWMD.

SUSSEX COUNTY – Agricultural Award

Allen and Sondra Messick, Seaford. The Messicks have a longstanding relationship with the Sussex Conservation District (SCD) as strong supporters of cover crops and soil health, participating every year in the District's cover crop program. Last year, they also participated in the SCD's Air Seeder Pilot Program, planting a radish and cereal rye mix into standing corn.

The Messicks participate in USDA-NRCS's EQIP Program for irrigation water management and conservation tillage, as well as nutrient management under a plan written by the SCD. Other conservation practices include installing grass buffer strips on their farm to improve water quality and reduce erosion. They are also working with the University of Delaware, U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and DNREC on an irrigation study to see if the use of irrigation will improve nutrient uptake and water quality.

A fourth-generation farmer who owns 300 acres grown with corn, wheat and soybeans, Allen attends as many soil health workshops as he can and works "behind the scenes" promoting soil health and cover crops to workshop participants. Allen also serves as a resource for the small farmer's perspective on SCD programs such as cover crops, soil health and the air seeder.

As a manager on the Bucks Branch Tax Ditch, Allen used the SCD's equipment program with USDA-NRCS's EQIP funds to implement a bank stabilization project on the tax ditch. The bank stabilization project used green technology and bioengineering to complete the project which incorporated vegetative practices such as coconut fiber coir logs and live stakes.

Allen and Sondra are committed to improving soil health on their farm and have been completely no-till for more than 15

years, with some fields being no-tilled as long as 25 years. Allen also serves as a trustee on the Farmland Preservation Board, a director on the Sussex County Farm Bureau and past president of the Delaware Soybean Board. The Messicks' commitment to improving water quality and protecting the environment makes them good stewards of the land and outstanding cooperators.

SUSSEX COUNTY – Urban Award

The Ridings of Rehoboth Beach Homeowners Association. Located off Beaver Dam and Hopkins Road in Lewes, the Ridings of Rehoboth Beach is a 225-lot community which drains into Bundicks Branch, a tributary of the Inland Bays. With its Sediment and Stormwater Management Plan approved by the Sussex Conservation District (SCD) in 2005, the development's infrastructure was constructed during the height of the market, with builders anticipating the planned community would be complete within a short timeframe. However, when building construction came to a halt in the late 2000s, the Ridings, like many developments, was left with unfinished phases unmaintained for years.

In 2013, several residents attended the SCD's annual Stormwater Maintenance Seminar. The residents identified compliance issues and wanted to ensure that the community's stormwater system was functioning as intended by the time it was turned over to their homeowners association. The group soon educated themselves on stormwater management, developed a good understanding of how the interconnected ponds and swales worked in their community and formed a good working partnership with the SCD and other local government agencies.

Around this same time, a new developer purchased the remaining lots in the development. The SCD worked with residents and the new developer to ensure all deficiencies were addressed. Community residents continued to educate themselves with SCD and DNREC resources. One resident even took training to earn

the state designation of certified construction reviewer to become better informed of his community's stormwater system.

Today, as the community nears completion, all six of its stormwater facilities are in compliance with SCD. The Ridings Homeowners Association has established contracts with a local pond maintenance company which has enhanced buffers and improved the overall aesthetics of the development. They also developed a community website, educated residents on the importance of pond buffers and distributed fact sheets on stormwater and swale conveyance and best management practices.

Most recently, the community has applied for an Urban Forestry Grant. In addition, the current homeowners association president sits on the Sussex County Drainage Workgroup Committee, a group of stakeholders who make recommendations to Sussex County Council on how to address drainage and grading standards as well as road and sidewalk specifications for the county.

The Ridings Homeowners Association is a great example of homeowners becoming stewards of the land and working with agencies to collectively solve problems.

Delaware Association of Conservation Districts' Legislator of the Year

State Senator Karen E. Peterson, 9th District. The Delaware Association of Conservation Districts also recognized Senator Peterson with an annual award given to a legislator for outstanding service, loyalty and devotion to conservation efforts in Delaware. Sen. Peterson has served in the Delaware General Assembly representing New Castle County since 2002. She serves on the following Senate committees: Adult & Juvenile Corrections; Community/County Affairs; Finance; Highways & Transportation (Chair); Labor & Industrial Relations; Natural Resources & Environmental Control; and Veterans Affairs.

As a member of the Senate's Natural Resources & Environmental Control Committee, Sen. Peterson advises Delaware's natural resource and conservation leaders on a wide range of related issues. She is a consistent advocate for locally-based conservation projects throughout New Castle County and Delaware.

In 2014, Sen. Peterson and Representative Michael Ramone provided funding to protect a block of homes on 2nd Street in the community of Green Valley, a project which was recognized today with the Governor's Urban Conservation Award for New Castle County. This project, constructed in 2015, benefited 17 townhomes whose backyards were impacted by the periodic flooding of the White Clay Creek.

Prior to serving as a full-time legislator, Sen. Peterson worked for the Delaware Department of Labor for 27 years, including service as the director of the Division of Industrial Affairs. In addition, she served as the president of New Castle County Council for eight years. Sen. Peterson has been inducted in the Hall of Fame for Delaware Women and has won numerous awards, including Woman of the Year from three different organizations.

Second place winner of National Conservation Poster Contest recognized

Also receiving special recognition at the awards ceremony was Maylene Drew Ferrin, a home-schooled 10th grader from Hartly. Maylene was Delaware's state high school level winner in the Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD) annual conservation poster contest, qualifying her colorful poster for entry representing Delaware in the National Association of Conservation Districts' (NACD) conservation poster contest, themed "Local Heroes – Your Hardworking Pollinators." Her poster, which was displayed with other national winners at the NACD's annual meeting in Reno, Nev., was framed and presented back to her today.

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